



Shriver Center 50th Anniversary Justice Dinners

In 2017, the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law will enter its 50th year! One of our most important goals during this historic occasion is to elevate the conversation about the causes and symptoms of poverty and racial injustice in the United States and the critical nature of state level decisions.

We can think of no better way to reach people's hearts and minds than through the passion of our ambassadors, friends, and supporters. Our goal is have our community hold 50 Justice Dinners in honor of our 50th Anniversary. The goal of these dinners is primarily to connect people with the mission of the organization – not fundraising. For that reason, these dinners are intimate and interactive. We believe they will make our community stronger and more effective. Thank you for being part of our movement.

Below are some guidelines for pulling it together and our team will be with you every step along the way.

Planning (Beginning At Least 6 weeks in advance)

- Contact Harleen Singh, Events Manager, harleensingh@povertylaw.org or 312.368.1098, Shriver Center to discuss scheduling.
- Invite between 8 and 15 people who have a common interest in anti-poverty work and policy. Your gathering should include at least one Shriver Center staff person or volunteer.
- It's usually best to invite a mix of people, some of whom know one another while others do not.
- Avoid inviting a celebrity, powerful business executive, or political leader whose power or charisma are likely to lead others at the dinner to defer to him or her. Everyone at the dinner should feel equally free to contribute.
- Discuss possible dinner questions with Harleen or other members of Shriver team.
- Choose a quiet location where the conversation can comfortably be heard, possibly a home or private room in a restaurant.
- Select an opening question that is related to the dinner theme and encourage each person at the table to tell a personal story (e.g., "Who was your favorite teacher of all time?").



- Solicit brief written biographies (100-150 words) from each participant in the dinner.
- Send out the opening question and biographies ahead of time so people will be ready to carry on the conversation.
- Select a dinner moderator—someone with a light style but who can move the conversation around and stimulate discussion. The moderator and the host may be different individuals.

Step 2: During the Dinner

- 7 p.m.: Cocktails, light conversation before seating.
- 7:30 p.m.: Moderator opens by explaining the ground rules. Most important: No talking to your neighbor; we are having a whole-table conversation.
- Ask each person at the table to respond to the opening question.
- Moderator introduces a follow-up question to link the opening answers to the general theme of the evening. This may propose a problem related to it that those at the table can address together. The question could be directly related to the work of the Shriver Center, i.e. “how can we move anti-poverty advocacy forward.”
- Let the discussion begin! Moderator should keep the conversation relevant, prevent side discussions from breaking up the table, and ensure that no one or two people are overly dominant.
- 9:15 p.m.: Moderator asks each person at the table to describe any ideas or thoughts they had during the discussion that they would like to follow up on or work with someone on . . . or just think about more.
- 9:30 p.m.: End dinner. Informal one-on-one conversations usually continue.

Step 3: After the Dinner (Within Two Weeks)

- Moderator and John Bouman will send out a note giving the dinner participants’ contact information and summarizing the follow-up points listed at the dinner’s end.
- Follow up over the next few weeks, helping people connect with one another and with the Shriver Center if desired. In consultation with the host, the Shriver Center may choose to follow-up



with interested dinner attendees.

- Invite some of the most enthusiastic participants in the dinner to host Justice Dinners of their own.

Notes

- Crafting the right initial question for a Justice Dinner is important. It must be designed to elicit stories (rather than, for example, canned opinions, theoretical discussions, or examples drawn from the media). Avoid a question that can be answered with a Yes or No, while also choosing a question that can be answered in around two minutes. The goal is to enhance the potential for personal connections among the guests, as well as a personal connection with the evening's theme. The team at the Shriver Center will help you with this process.
- The exact nature of the follow-up questions you ask may vary depending on the specific goal of the dinner. After each attendee has had a chance to describe one or more personal experiences related to the theme of the evening (a story of self), the moderator can ask how these experiences are connected with the interests of the entire group (a story of us) and then with the work of the nonprofit organization that has sponsored the dinner (a story of now). It's an effective structure because it works!
- Finally, as the time for concluding the dinner approaches, everyone in attendance is asked how they plan to follow up on the evening's discussion. There's no pressure to respond in a particular way. (And there's certainly no intention to elicit donations or pledges in support of the nonprofit organization.) One participant may offer a response as simple as "I intend to learn and think more about the topics we've discussed." Another may make a specific commitment growing out of the evening's conversation: "I'll be calling Susan, whom I met for the first time this evening, to find out more about her work and to learn whether my company might be able to support her in some way." And occasionally, the follow-up promises include the birth of a major new philanthropic commitment. Every response, from the most modest to the most ambitious, is entirely acceptable.

Why Hold a Justice Dinner?

As we've described, a Justice Dinner is *not* a fundraising event. No pitch or presentation is made, no brochures are distributed, no checks or pledges are solicited or accepted. What purposes do they serve?

- ***A Justice Dinner enlists new allies.***
- ***A Justice Dinner helps to create and disseminate ideas.***
- ***A Justice Dinner expands attendees' networks.***



- ***A Justice Dinner spreads knowledge about and interest in the Shriver Center.***

Thank you for being such a wonderful supporter and ally. We could not be a voice for the 43.1 million people living in poverty without you.